

Message Text

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44

ACTION EA-09

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OMB-01 COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 CU-02 /072 W

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

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INFO COMUSMACTHAI BANGKOK

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 23618

E.O. 1162: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, TH

SUBJ: SENI RE-ELECTED DEMOCRAT PARTY LEADER

SUMMARY. M.R. SENI PRAMOT WAS RE-ELECTED DEMOCRAT PARTY LEADER SUNDAY, NOV. 9. A LIBERAL CONSERVATIVE SPLIT WITHIN THE PARTY EMERGED AND AN IMPORTANT DEMOCRAT SUPPORTER RESIGNED FROM THE PARTY. THE LIBERALS MADE SOME GAINS BUT THE PARTY REMAINS DOMINATED BY OLD GUARD CONSERVATIVES. VOTING IRREGULARITIES WERE CHARGED DURING THE CONVENTION. END SUMMARY

1. THE DEMOCRAT PARTY CONVENTION YESTERDAY RE-ELECTED FORMER PRIME MINISTER (1946, 1975) M.R. SENI PRAMOT AS PARTY LEADER. SENI'S ONLY OPPONENT, SURAT OSATHANUKHRO, BACKED BY SOME LIBERALS IN THE PARTY, WITHDREW HIS NAME FROM CONSIDERATION LAST WEEK AND RESIGNED FROM THE PARTY. THE VOTE FOR SENI WAS UNANIMOUS. FOUR DEPUTY LEADERS AND SIXTEEN CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS WERE ALSO CHOSEN.

2. THE RESIGNATION OF SURAT, ONE OF THE PARTY'S MAIN FINANCIERS, UNDERLINES THE SERIOUS DIVISIONS WHICH HAVE PLAUGUED THAILAND'S OLDEST PARTY IN RECENT MONTHS. LIBERALS WITHIN THE PARTY HAVE BEEN ATTEMPTING TO INCREASE THEIR INFLUENCE AT THE EXPENSE OF THE CONSER-
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VATIVES, WHO HAVE CONTROLLED THE PARTY SINCE ITS FOUND-

ING. SENI HAS GENERALLY TRIED TO MODERATE BETWEEN THE TWO FACTIONS, BUT IN THE CASE OF SURAT, MODERATION FAILED. SENI ALSO HAD DIFFICULTY WHEN HE TRIED TO NOMINATE MEMBERS FOR THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE (HE WAS TO CHOOSE FOUR OF THE SIXTEEN SELECTED), NEWSPAPERS REPORTED THAT THREE OF HIS NOMINEES REFUSED THE HONOR, AND SENI THREATENED TWICE TO EXPEL ANYONE ELSE REFUSING. THE CHOICES FOR DEPUTY LEADER INCLUDED TWO CONSERVATIEVES AND TWO LIBERALS. THE TWO CONSERVATIVES RECEIVED THE HIGHEST AND SECOND HIGHEST NUMBER OF VOTES, PROBABLY A GOOD MEASURE OF THE RELATIVE STRENGTH OF THE TWO FACTIONS. THE LIBERAL WING OF THE PARTY IMPROVED ITS STANDING, BUT NOT ENOUGH TO GAIN CONTROL OF THE PARTY.

3. BANGKOK NEWSPAPERS REPORTED THAT SEVERAL MP'S AT THE CONVENTION CHARGED VOTE BUYING AND BALLOT BOX STUFFING DURING THE VOTING. SENI LATER TACITLY ADMITTED THAT THERE WERE IRREGULARITIES BU SIAD IT WAS "JUST AN ORDINARY ISSUE." OTHER PARTY LEADERS ALSO ATTEMPTED TO PLAY DOWN THE PROBLEMS. APPARENTLY NOT ALL IRREGULARITIES OCCURRED INSIDE THE CONVENTION HALL. THE NEWSPAPER NATION REPORTED THAT YOUNG PARTY WORKERS SOLD THE BOX LUNCHEAS MEANT FOR THE CONVENTIONEERS TO THE PUBLIC, AND DISTRIBUTED THE PROFITS AMONG THEMSELVES.

4. COMMENT: WHILE SENI'S POSITION AS LEADER WAS CHALLENGED AND THE LIBERAL WING MADE SOME GAINS, THE CONSERVATIVES IN THE PARTY APPARENTLY HAVE MANAGED TO RETAIN THEIR CONTROL OVER THE PARTY APPARATUS. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN HOW MUCH THE RESIGNATION OF SURAT WILL HURT THE PARTY. THE NEW CENTRAL COMMITTEE WILL MEET ON NOV 13 TO SELECT THE PARTY SECRETARY GENERAL, AN IMPORTANT PARTY POSITION.
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